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OCI No. 3209/63

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
 Office of Current Intelligence
 5 November 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Insurgency in Laos and South Vietnam

1. Laos

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 a. Pathet Lao pressure appears to have been stepped up somewhat in the Nhommarath region and the Plaine des Jarres area where small-scale clashes have occurred. [redacted] Pathet Lao preparations for further activity north of the Plaine. No significant change in the general pattern of Communist harassment is evident, however.

b. Premier Souvanna's conversations in Moscow apparently resulted in no significant change in the noncommittal Soviet attitude toward the Lao problem. While Souvanna said that the Soviets again indicated their willingness to supply some equipment to neutralist military forces, it seems unlikely that Moscow is prepared to supply more than a symbolic amount of military assistance.

2. South Vietnam

a. The overthrow of the Diem government appears to be widely popular, but it is too early to discern what effect the formation of a provisional government will have in uniting the country. The greater latitude of the military in prosecuting the war against the Viet Cong will be a favorable factor.

b. Moscow, Peiping, and Hanoi have all accused the United States of masterminding the coup and have labeled the new leaders American puppets. Hanoi's appeal to the South Vietnamese forces and ordinary citizens to rise against the "American imperialists and their stooges" was ignored, and there has been no significant Viet Cong military reaction to the coup. Communist military activity preceding the coup was at a normal level.

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c. The Viet Cong continue to capture more and better weapons than they lose, particularly the highly prized automatic weapons and mortars.

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OCI No. 2549/63

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
6 August 1963

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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Insurgency in South Vietnam and Laos

1. South Vietnam

a. Incidents and armed attacks initiated by the Viet Cong continued at a high level through the last week of July, marking the third consecutive week of increased activity and the longest sustained period of such operations this year. There were relatively few attacks by company-size or larger units, however, and there are no indications that any increase in Viet Cong capabilities or shift in tactics has occurred. Recently captured Viet Cong documents provide further evidence that Viet Cong food supplies in the central highlands have been affected by government operations. Some guerrilla units have reportedly been diverted from military activity to food production tasks.

b. The Buddhist problem is unresolved. It may be aggravated by the self-immolation of another monk, which occurred on 4 August, and by renewed criticisms of the Buddhists by members of President Diem's family. Conservative Buddhist leaders reportedly have said that they are under increasing pressure from extremist clergy to shift the dispute from religious to political grounds. These leaders feel that a quick settlement is necessary if they are to keep control of the movement.

2. Laos

Military activity continues at a low level.

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BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

Research Memorandum
RFE-66, December 19, 1962

TO : FE - Governor Harriman *Roger Hilsman*

FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman *Roger Hilsman*

SUBJECT: Capsule Assessment of the Effort in South Vietnam

CH2 JUN

The strategic concept for South Vietnam calls for military, political, economic, and social actions on such a scale and so coordinated as to constitute a national response to the Viet Cong challenge. Broadly, the concept calls for:

- 1) developing military and para-military counterguerrilla capabilities;
- 2) separating and protecting the population from the Viet Cong; and
- 3) applying the political, economic, and social measures necessary to convert military successes into political gains.

There appears to be no reason as yet to question the soundness of the concept. But there is a very real question as to how well and wholeheartedly it is being put into effect. The purpose of this paper is to assess the implementation of the concept during 1962.

Counterguerrilla Capabilities

This phase of the concept is relatively separable and non-political and the one in which direct US aid and advice play the largest role.

A. Progress

There has been notable progress in improving counterguerrilla capabilities, largely as a direct result of US military aid and advice.

-- Vietnam's forces are now supplied with the weapons and instructed in the tactics suitable for counterguerrilla warfare.

-- US helicopters and radios have vastly improved Vietnamese tactical mobility.

-- Vietnamese forces are beginning to engage the Viet Cong in small-unit actions. Night operations, though still limited, are increasing.

-- Nearly 2,000 US-trained Montagnards are now conducting armed patrols designed to provide intelligence and, to some extent, to interdict Viet Cong access routes through Laos.

-- Self Defense Corps and Civil Guard units have been roughly doubled in the past year and are being further expanded in order to provide local defense to the strategic hamlets.

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-- During September and October, the GVN forces were able for the first time to capture more weapons from the Viet Cong than they lost.

B. Problems

These increased capabilities, however, have not yet been exploited as effectively as they might be.

-- GVN military forces continue to rely heavily on large-scale operations and conventional tactics.

-- Excessive use of air strikes in the absence of ground contact with the enemy continues to kill a lot of innocent peasants.

-- Inadequate delegation of authority and political interference by the Vietnamese leadership has restricted initiative in the field.

-- Independent and offensive deployment of Civil Guard and SDC units has weakened strategic hamlet defense and produced heavy casualties.

Isolating the Viet Cong and Winning the Peasants

Establishment of strategic hamlets and systematic military-political pacification are distinct but necessarily integrated phases of the strategic concept. The purpose of these measures is to isolate and protect the peasants from the Communists, to gain their support in the counter-guerrilla effort, and, ultimately, to produce lasting political and socio-economic gains at the local level.

A. Progress

The government has given high priority to the strategic hamlet program which since March has been progressively infused with a systematic military-political pacification effort.

-- According to the GVN, more than 3,500 strategic hamlets have been completed, more than 2,000 are under construction. The current rate of construction is 300-400 a month. It is not certain, however, how much of the strategic hamlet program has been carried out. In many, nothing seems to have been done but to construct a barbed wire or bamboo fence.

-- The hamlets have become a major Viet Cong target, suggesting that Viet Cong feel that their access to the people is being threatened. However, we cannot generalize about the success with which hamlets have withstood Viet Cong attacks.

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-- In March 1962 President Diem approved the "Delta Pacification Plan" which provides for a systematic military-political pacification of eleven provinces integrated with the strategic hamlet program. Similar plans have since been drawn up for individual provinces elsewhere. Pacification operations are actually in progress in six provinces -- Binh Duong (Operation Sunrise, later expanded to parts of Tay Ninh and Phuoc Tuy), Phu Yen (Operation Sea Swallow), Binh Dinh (Operation Let's Go), and Quang Ngai (Operation Royal Phoenix). Plans for four more provinces (Vinh Long, Dinh Tuong, Vinh Binh, and Long An) have recently been approved.

-- Preliminary results of the integrated pacification programs are encouraging. The strategic hamlets in these areas are generally well organized and defended. Considerable effort is being devoted to follow-up social and political measures aimed at improving the lot of the peasants and developing their identification with the government's counterinsurgency effort. Peasant discontent over mistreatment, forced labor, and probably inadequate compensation has been reduced perceptibly in recent operations.

B. Problems

However, the hamlet program on the whole has been precipitous and uncoordinated and the pacification plans slow to be implemented.

-- Vietnamese leadership looks upon the strategic hamlet program as a panacea, and there is still considerable confusion among local officials as to the objectives of the program and procedures for implementing it.

-- Strategic hamlets have been and are still being thrown together in the absence of a coordinated pacification effort, such as conceived in the Delta Plan, and with only perfunctory attention to defense, social, economic, and administrative improvements. In spite of government efforts to maintain standards and to provide personnel to administer such hamlets effectively, many are inadequately defended and few are providing benefits to the peasants.

-- Pacification operations have been applied to only six of the South Vietnam's 41 provinces and have been completed in none. Although Diem formally assigned top priority to the Delta Plan provinces in August, he has failed -- probably for political reasons -- to subordinate the strategic hamlet program to the Delta Plan and, indeed, to the general pacification effort itself.

Assessment

The RVN has developed an effective strategic concept for counter-insurgency and has in fact mounted a national effort to implement it. The principal defects appear to arise mainly from improper emphasis applied to various aspects of the concept.

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-- The Army has overemphasized large-scale actions and the use of artillery and airpower, as compared with small-unit actions and intelligence collections. Although emphasis on patrols and ambushes appears to be increasing, continued and excessive use of air power and crop destruction -- however well controlled -- may well develop a militant opposition from the peasants and their positive identification with the Viet Cong.

-- The GVN has overemphasized the establishment of strategic hamlets per se and has only begun to fit them into integrated military-political pacification efforts.

-- GVN failure to emphasize political, social, and economic reform at the outset may deprive the entire effort of much of its impact. Much depends on the ability of the government to show convincing evidence of its intent to improve the lot of the peasants. Instead, government efforts appear to be aimed largely at increasing government control over the peasants.

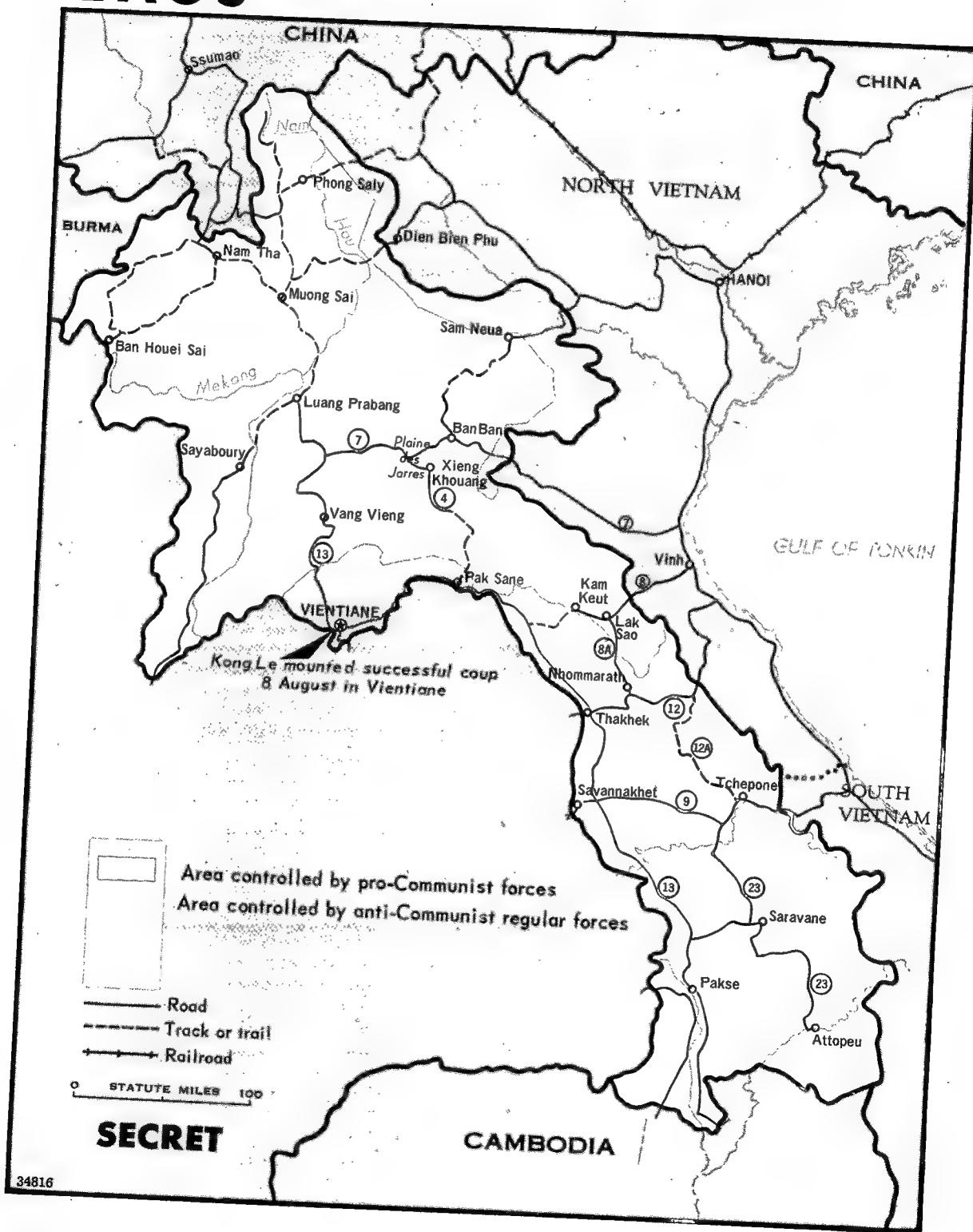
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1 September 1960
Situation following Kong Le coup

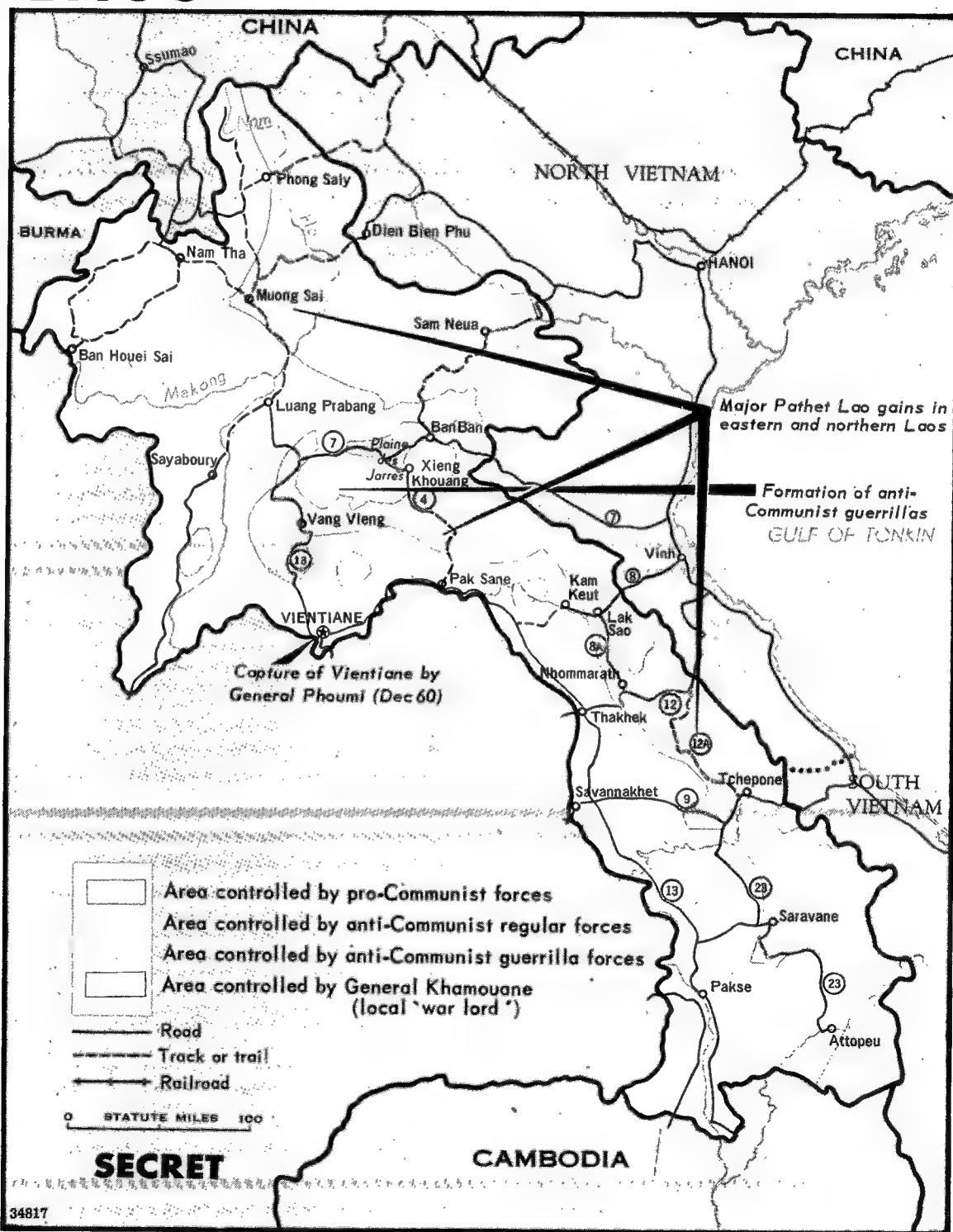
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3 May 1961

Situation at time of cease-fire

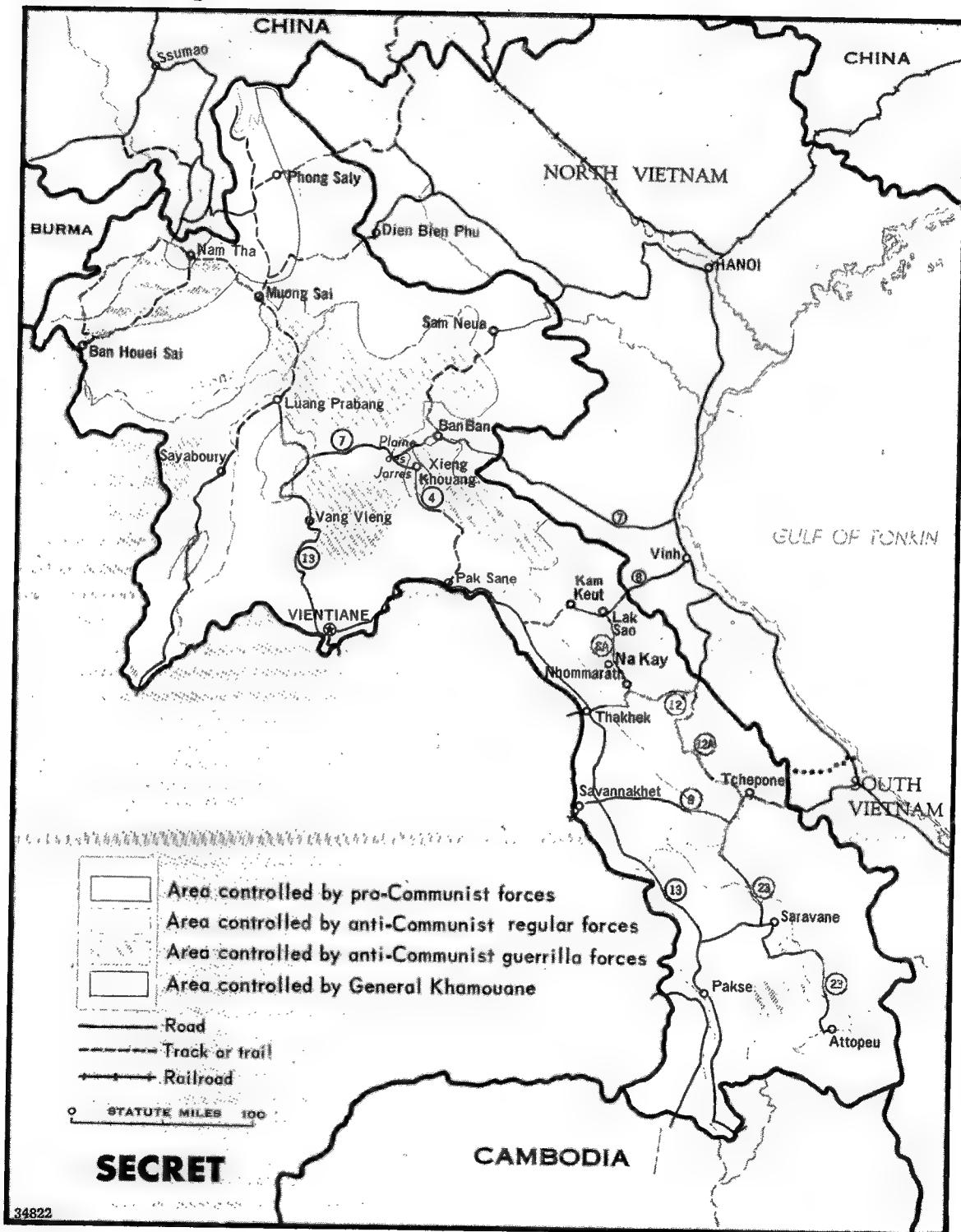
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1 March 1964

Situation following Pathet Lao move against
Na Kay area in central Laos

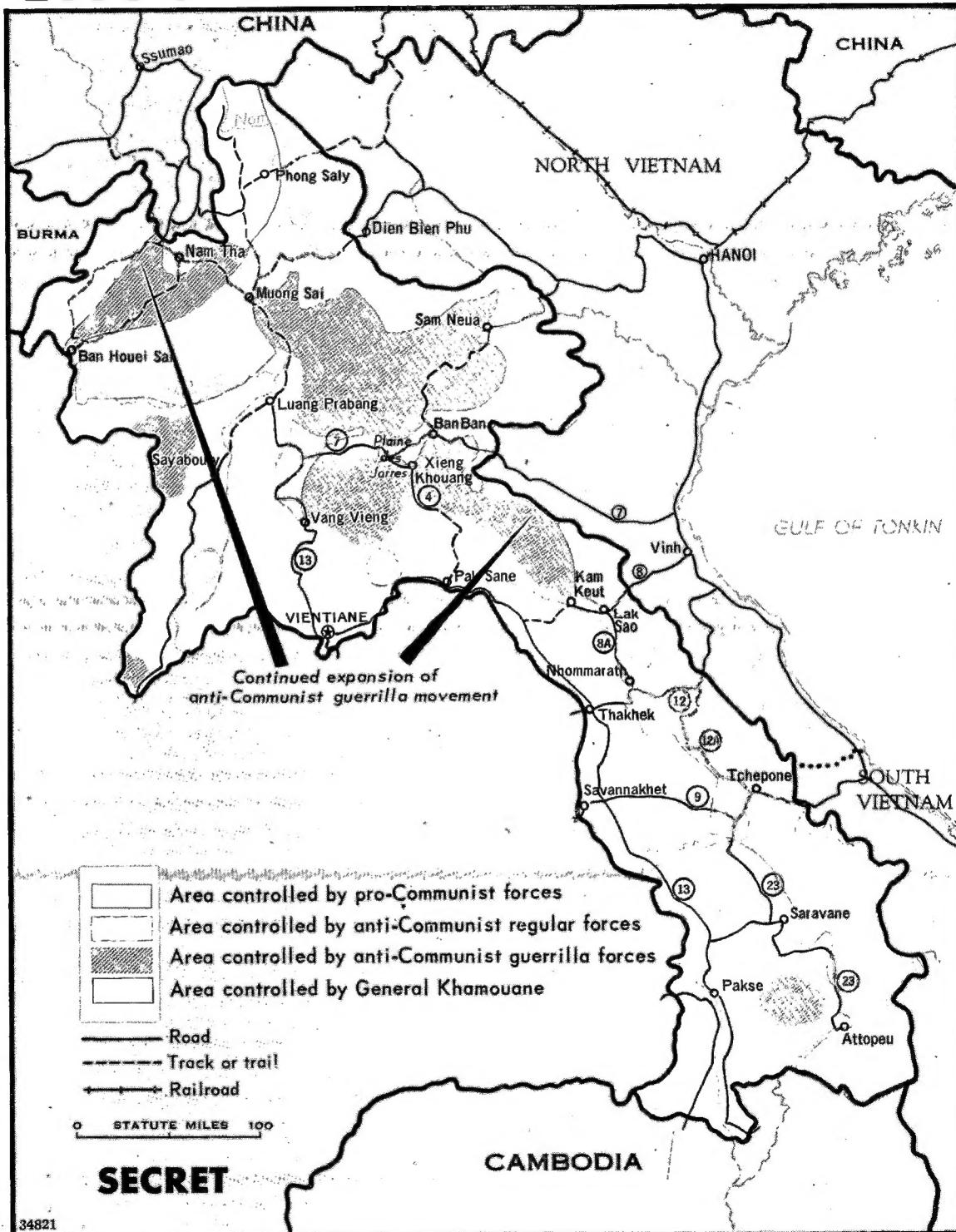
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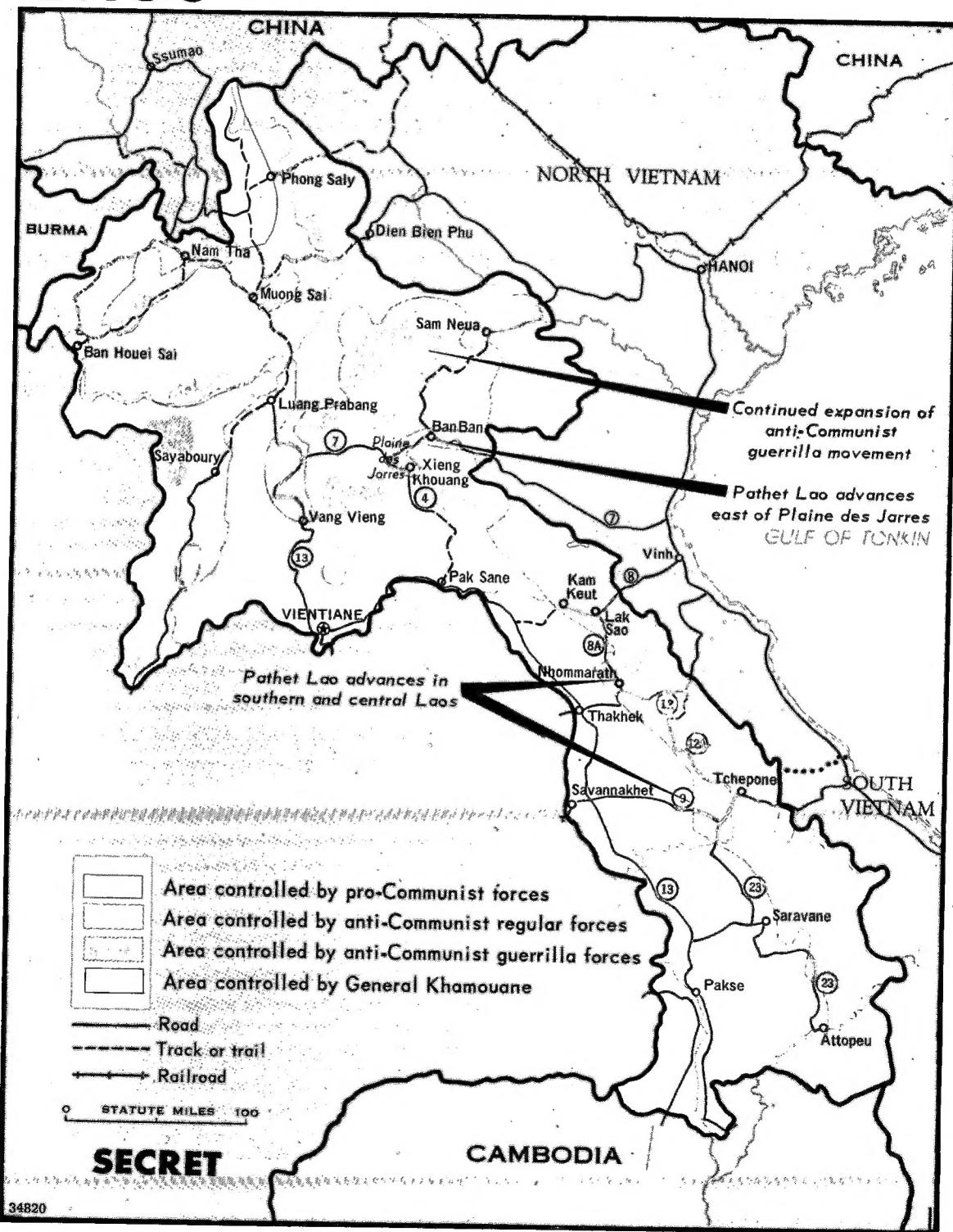
15 December 1963
 Situation following FAR advances to
 Lak Sao in central Laos

LAOS



30 June 1963
General situation

LAOS

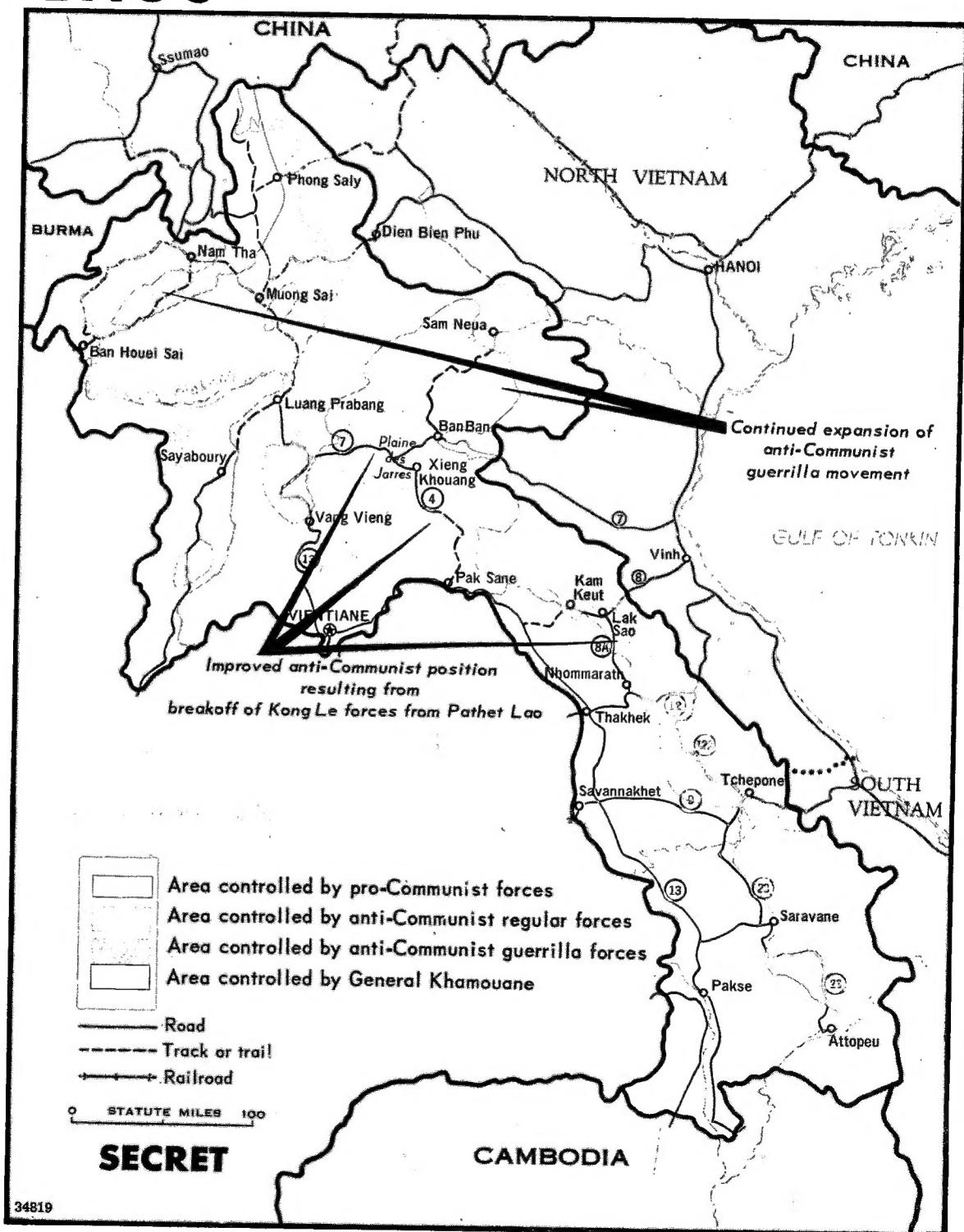


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1 April 1963
Situation at time of Quinim assassination

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23 July 1962

Situation at signing of Geneva Agreements

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